Research Report

SURVEY OF

HIGHLY QUALIFIED MANPOWER NEEDS

IN NORTHERN ALBERTA

1987

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A SURVEY OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED MANPOWER NEEDS IN NORTHERN ALBERTA

INTRODUCTION

The 1987 Survey of Highly Qualified Manpower Needs in Northern Alberta is the follow-up to a study conducted in 1985 by Dr. Ann Harvey of Harvey Social Research Ltd. The 1985 study surveyed a large cross-section of northern-based employers. In her final report to the Northern Development Branch, Dr. Harvey included a list of employers for a future manpower survey. This list became the basis for the present survey analyzed in the 1987 follow-up report.

METHODOLOGY

Telephone interviews were conducted with all employers on the employers' list submitted by Harvey Social Research Ltd. The survey instrument was a four-page questionnaire. Data obtained from each telephone interview were tabulated on the questionnaire.

These data were analyzed in a number of ways. First, they were analyzed on the basis of three general occupational categories:

i) Science and Engineering
ii) Social Sciences, Management and Education
iii) Medicine and Health

Then, the data were further analyzed according to vacancy projections. Employers were asked to predict employment opportunities based on two scenarios. The first one, known as the "attrition" scenario, assumed there would be no major economic change in the region and that openings would result from normal labor force turnover or attrition. The second scenario conjectured there would be "new economic growth" resulting from a major economic change in the region. In this latter case, employers were asked to briefly describe the project and its general locations as well as to estimate its possible effect on employment within the employer's organization.

It should be noted that most interviewees were hesitant to comment on the second scenario. This would appear to be because of the recent economic downturn and the government restraint program.

Comments, generally, indicated a fair amount of hesitation about planning in today's economic slump. Most respondents believe a high level of industrial expansion would be required before they could contemplate changes to their hiring predictions in scenario one.

Finally, replies to the general questions which concluded the interview were analyzed. These questions gave the interviewees an opportunity to comment generally on manpower needs and the Northern Alberta Development Council Bursary Program.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Four occupation categories emerged during analysis:

(1) "Very difficult to hire for," marked by high turnover and high vacancy rates

(2) "Difficult to hire for," marked by low turnover but long vacancies

(3) "Moderately difficult to hire for," marked by high turnover but short vacancies

(4) "Relatively easy to hire for," marked by low turnover and short vacancies

1. Occupations in the "very difficult to hire for" category are:

Physio-therapist	Pharmacist
Occupational Therapist	French Immersion Teacher
Dental Hygienist	French Instruction Teacher
Speech Therapist	Audiologist
RN for Solicitor General	Reading Specialist
Baccalaureate Degree Nurses	

In the "very difficult to hire for" occupations, positions remain vacant for long periods of time and, when filled, turnover is high. This leads to two problems:

(1) Difficulty in recruitment results in the necessity for specialized recruitment techniques.

(2) High-need occupations such as those of audiology and reading specialty are either abolished or never created because communities cannot attract these highly-skilled and high-in-demand people.

Those graduates in the "very difficult to hire for" occupations who do relocate to northern Alberta tend to stay for less than two years. They are frequently lured away to more urban areas by promises of better compensation, more professional opportunities and a more congenial work situation.

2. Occupations in the "difficult to hire for" category where turnover is not high are:

Junior High/Senior High Math and Science Teacher
Music Teacher
Home Economics Teacher
Librarian
Industrial Arts Teacher

Where it is difficult to hire but where turnover is not high, some form of specialized recruitment is required but not to the same extent as in the "very difficult" occupations.

3. The third category of occupation is where turnover is frequent but vacancies are of short duration. Occupations in this category include:

RN without a degree
Day Care Worker
Generalist teacher in small isolated communities
Living Unit Officer with the Solicitor General
Probation Officer with the Solicitor General

Many new graduates, particularly those in occupations marked by high turnover and short vacancy periods, locate in northern communities to get initial experience and then move on to more urban communities. This is an especially common pattern among generalist teachers in isolated communities. Their pattern is to teach there only for the two year period required for certification.

4. The fourth category of occupation is where there are low turnover rates and short vacancy periods. These include:

RNA	Laboratory Technician
X-Ray Technician	Generalist Teacher
Computer Science Graduate	Engineers
Business Administration Graduate	Forestry Graduate

5. In addition to the four general occupational categories, there are three general community groupings for northern Alberta. These are:

(1) Small communities with stable populations within a two-hour drive of Edmonton
(2) Large regional towns and cities with stable populations anywhere in the North
(3) Small isolated communities, frequently with transient populations.

Employers located in communities in groupings 1 and 2 do not appear to have trouble staffing positions in occupations marked by either "high turnover and low vacancy rates" or "low turnover and low vacancy rates."

Employers in small isolated communities (grouping 3) have difficulty in staffing all types of positions. They are able to recruit personnel in high-turnover, low-vacancy positions but experience difficulty in retaining these people. Recruitment in the first two categories is very difficult.

Employers in all three kinds of communities have difficulty in recruiting to occupations in the "difficult to fill" and "very difficult to fill" categories.

Employers in Science and Engineering occupations do not seem to be affected by community grouping. These employers experience little difficulty in recruiting new graduates. This may be attributable to the internal structure of resource-based industries which is characterized by frequent relocation and internal transfer.

These findings are general in nature and reflect tendencies and trends. The research did turn up some specific anomalies such as when a "very difficult to fill" or a "difficult to fill" occupation category was filled as a result of specific reasons, for example, a spouse's transfer.

SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

INTRODUCTION

Employers in this category are usually involved in resource based activities. They tend to recruit graduates in engineering, forestry, business administration and technical programs from NAIT or SAIT. The recent down-turn in oil prices has seriously curtailed the recruitment policies of a number of these companies. Most employers indicated that recruitment of newly graduated personnel is not a problem. The difficulty is at the more senior level. The mobile nature of employment with a resource-based enterprise creates the expectation of travel and relocation as part of the early career path.

Because of the greater willingness of employees of these companies to relocate, the science and engineering group do not fit into the occupational and community groupings already discussed. Rather, the distinction is between inexperienced and experienced qualified personnel, with inexperienced people being much easier to recruit.

1. SCENARIO 1: ATTRITION

In this scenario, projected vacancies are based on normal labor force turnover.

Engineer

There were 36 to 42 projected vacancies for 1987 and another 36 to 42 for 1988, of which 30 to 35 for each year were with one large northern operator.

Each company representative indicated that recruitment at the entry level is not a problem. In the words of one recruiter, "It's a buyer's market."

Electrical, mechanical and chemical engineers are the three types of engineers most in demand.

Forestry Graduate

There were two projected vacancies for 1987 and another two for 1988. These vacancies are with the same company. Its representative indicated that recruitment is not difficult.

Computer Science Graduates

There were three projected vacancies for 1987 and 1988.

Business Administration

There were two to three projected vacancies for both 1987 and 1988. Another recruiter who did not fit within this category, indicated that business administration positions in his organization are usually filled by internal transfer of experienced people.

Accounting/Business

There were two projected vacancies for 1987 and 1988 for NAIT/SAIT graduates in business or accounting.

Technician

There were four to five projected vacancies in 1987 and two to three projected vacancies in 1988. It should be emphasized that a larger number than this are actually recruited each year either through internal transfer or recruitment several months after graduation.

2. SCENARIO 2: NEW ECONOMIC GROWTH

Interviewees were unwilling to speculate on this scenario. Most recruiters believe that their companies' situation will remain stable. They do not foresee much expansion in the near future. The several recruiters who project some expansion of operations see it as the result of a new industrial project coming on stream. There was a belief that construction will not improve for two to three years so that initial employment will probably be construction-related activities with a transient work force.

One recruiter may hire two technicians as the result of expansion to a northern operation while another sees some potential to hire a planner.

3. GENERAL QUESTIONS ON NADC BURSARY

The three general questions in this section provided an opportunity for survey interviewees to comment on their own recruitment policies and on the NADC Bursary Program. For the most part, those questioned did not believe that the Bursary Program affected their recruitment policies. They cited three reasons for this belief:

(i) Recruitment for highly skilled manpower occurs on-campus, often at a number of different universities throughout western Canada.

(ii) Hiring is done through head office.

(iii) The nature of resource-based activity and the organization of companies engaged in it, seems to foster an expectation of mobility in the initial career stages. Consequently, new graduates expect relocation to the North as part of their career paths.

QUESTION 1: Have you any suggestions to make about the Bursary Program based on your own experience in hiring new graduates?

A number of recruiters were not directly familiar with the Program. Those familiar with it, tended to emphasize general recruiting problems such as the importance of computer literacy, the structure of the oil industry, and work experience.

Some comments were:

"The program is well targeted and something I would praise because of the payback. In terms of who gets it, I think you want to encourage more funding toward programs with a high computer technology component. We're finding in the general accounting and office administration stream that they are using and working with the computer as a tool..."

"...one of the concerns I have with the Bursary is, you have to accept work in the northern Alberta engineering and technology side of oil and

gas. This is not always possible with internal company policy because the company often wants them in head office for more training. This ties the hands of young people in programs in the oil and gas industry."

"The problem is getting work experience. Tie programs in with employers who could guarantee or tie in with work experience."

QUESTION 2: Have you any comments about hiring highly qualified manpower?

Generally, employers do not have problems recruiting highly qualified manpower. The problems cited relate to specific areas, either in terms of skill level or in terms of experience. One interesting remark made by a major northern employer indicated that there was less turnover with Alberta graduates than with graduates from universities outside the province. The company was tailoring its recruitment policy to reflect this fact.

"One of the problems in the oil patch is that we're automating our wells; we're putting in sophisticated electronic instrumentation that requires technologists to fix them as well as someone to be familiar with the gauges to measure what's going on."

"Not at all, no problem recruiting in the North. People have an opportunity to transfer back to Toronto or Hamilton."

"In some cases, yes. When we first came up here, expertise was not here in the North. We had trouble and had to hire in the south. That has

evolved and things are changing. We are now finding more of a pool available."

"With the years of experience that we require, i.e., electronic engineers, supply does not meet demand. When we look for new graduates with a little experience, we use co-op students. We tend to hire them because they've worked for us in work-terms. Someone with one to two years experience in a co-op is preferable to a fresh graduate."

"Not at the present time, with the economy the way it is. People are available and willing to relocate. The cost-of-living is higher but people are willing to accept that."

"No problems hiring staff; most come from Calgary or Edmonton. Hiring is done out of head office and people then go directly to Fort McMurray."

"It's not difficult; supply exceeds demand."

"We have a reasonable number of applicants, but not a flood. We try to hire summer students that we can eventually hire (full-time)."

QUESTION 3: Do you think the Bursary Program is an incentive for attracting graduates to your department's/firm's expertise?

Most interviewees did not see it as directly relevant although several saw it as having a role in the process of recruitment. One recruiter for a large company mentioned that Bursary holders might be directed to try applying to it for summer jobs which could later be the basis for full-time employment.

"No. It's very doubtful that we'll have any problem recruiting people. We're going to have more graduates than jobs. This is a change from around seven to eight years ago and the Bursary would be an incentive knowing people have a two-year obligation to work in the North; this commitment makes them somewhat more attractive but not significantly."

"I don't know. We never use criteria; we probably don't even know about it. This is something between you and the people who apply."

"Yes. If you don't spend money for training, they won't get it."

"If I was running a bursary program, I would run it with the employer and pay the money to employers. They do this in Britain; and it worked quite well there, almost like a 'bloc program.' The most important link is missing --'experience'; even if there was a minimum of six weeks of work experience, it would be a long-term help."

"Maybe three or four years ago it was an incentive."

SOCIAL SCIENCES, MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

While there was a sampling of social sciences and management interviewees in this category, the majority of interviewees represented education. Vacancies appeared to fall within all four general occupational groupings, most vacancies occurred within the first two categories:

(1) "Very difficult to hire for" occupations marked by high turnover and high vacancy rates

(2) "Difficult to hire for" occupations marked by high turnover but short vacancies

(3) "Moderately difficult to hire for" occupations marked by high turnover but short vacancies

(4) "Relatively easy to hire for" occupations marked by low turnover and short vacancies

In addition to the occupation category, the type and location of a community has a significant impact on vacancies and recruitment.

Employers made predictions for vacancies based on two economic scenarios and answered three general questions relating to the bursary and to recruitment.

1. SCENARIO 1: ATTRITION

CATEGORY 1: "VERY DIFFICULT TO HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

French Immersion Teacher

With 26 to 35 projected vacancies for 1987 and 20 to 30 for 1988, this occupation was the most frequently mentioned in this category. Because the number of French immersion teachers being graduated in Alberta does not meet the demand, school administrators must recruit in eastern Canada.

French Instruction Teacher

There were six projected vacancies for 1987 and five for 1988. This is not a large number but with the scarcity of Alberta graduated French teachers, recruitment can be difficult. It should be emphasized that the French immersion and French instruction occupations are closely related and some administrators were uncertain as to whether they would be hiring French immersion or French instruction teachers. As a result, numbers were assigned somewhat arbitrarily to the two occupations.

Special Education Teacher - French

The growth in popularity of French immersion programs has led to the need for special education teachers to work with French immersion students. There were two projected vacancies for 1987 and none for 1988. While this seems low, recruiting a teacher with this combination of skills could require a fairly intensive effort.

Reading Specialist (Master's Level)

There was one projected vacancy for 1987 and none for 1988. He also hoped that the position would be staffed into 1988 although the high turnover in this occupation may mean that the vacancy will recur in 1988.

Speech Therapist

There were three vacancies projected for the fall of 1987 and none for the fall of 1988. Like the reading specialist occupation, to which it is closely related, this is a highly-skilled occupation that is much in demand. There is a strong possibility that either some 1987 vacancies will remain vacant in 1988 or that the positions staffed in 1987 will be vacated by 1988.

Nurse with the Solicitor General's Department

There were eight projected vacancies for both 1987 and 1988. Recruitment for this occupation in this department is ongoing and turnover is frequent.

CATEGORY 2: "DIFFICULT TO HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

Occupations in this category are marked by low turnover and long vacancies. Intensive recruiting efforts are required.

Junior High/Senior High Math and Science Teacher

There were five to six projected vacancies for 1987 and another five to six for 1988. The specialized skills required mean there is a scarcity leading to the need for specialized recruitment when a vacancy occurs.

Industrial Arts Teacher

There were five predicted vacancies for 1987 and six for 1988. Several administrators commented that a vacancy in this occupation is difficult to fill. Again, this difficulty would seem to be related to the specialization required.

Music Teacher

There was one projected vacancy for 1987 and one for 1988. Like the other teaching occupations in this category, the high degree of specialization leads to scarcity and difficulties in recruitment.

Librarian (Master's Level)

There were six projected vacancies for 1987 and none for 1988. The 1988 projection was based on the assumption that all vacancies would be filled in 1987 with no subsequent turnover. This occupation is influenced by government funding for libraries and the number of vacancies could be vary upward or downward depending on what occurs in the next year.

CATEGORY 3: "MODERATELY DIFFICULT TO HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

This category is characterized by high turnover and low vacancy. There are usually more qualified applicants than positions so recruitment is not a problem. Thus, intensive recruiting for a single vacancy is not required; rather, recruiting is on-going from the pool of available candidates.

Day Care Workers

There were 10 to 12 vacancies projected for the fall of 1987 and another 10 to 12 for the fall of 1988. Location and distance influence this occupation insofar as day care centres in some areas are much easier to staff than in other centres.

Generalist Teacher in Small Isolated Communities

The total number of projected vacancies for generalist teachers was 45 to 47 in 1987 and 48 to 50 in 1988. Of these, approximately 32 in 1987 and 34 in 1988 will be required for small isolated communities. Many of those recruited will stay for two years and then move on to less isolated school districts. Administrators of school districts in isolated areas are resigned to this situation. Since they have a large pool of graduates to choose from, they regard recruiting as a more-or-less ongoing activity.

Probation Officer with the Solicitor General

There were 25 projected vacancies for both 1987 and 1988. There is a high turnover with people frequently transferring to more urban areas. But, recruitment from a pool of university-trained applicants is ongoing and vacancies are of short duration.

Living Unit Officer with the Solicitor General

There were 20 projected vacancies for both 1987 and 1988. Like probation officers, turnover is fairly high but there is a pool of available applicants.

Special Education Teacher

There were 12 to 13 projected vacancies for the fall of 1987 and 11 to 12 for 1988. There seems to be a pool of applicants with somewhat more specialized training than generalist teachers. Recent government cutbacks may impact programming for special education so that a number of positions will be abolished.

CVC Instructor

There are eight to nine projected vacancies for both 1987 and 1988. Because of the isolation involved in CVC teaching, turnover can be high.

CATEGORY 4: "EASY TO HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

This category is marked by more applicants than positions. As a result, job turnover is relatively low and vacancies of short duration.

Generalist Teacher

There were 45 to 47 vacancies in 1987 and 48 to 50 in 1988. However, the majority (32 in 1987 and 34 in 1988) were for isolated communities and so fall into category 3. The remaining 13 to 15 vacancies for 1987 and 14 to 16 vacancies for 1988 are for generalist teachers in the other two types of communities. This low number has been further affected by the government restraint program so many boards may reduce the number of teachers they employ. One administrator remarked that, "In 1987, because of cutbacks, we are looking at attrition without filling jobs. In 1988, it will be more difficult, because of the possibility of more cutbacks."

Recreation Worker

There were two projected vacancies for 1987 and none for 1988.

Counsellor/Youth Worker

There were three to four projected vacancies for 1987 and two to three for 1988.

Administrative Position (Art/Promotion, Executive Director, Accounting, Educational Administration)

There were five vacancies for 1987 and two for 1988.

Library Technician

There were one vacancy for 1987 and 11 for 1988. This assumes no cutbacks in government funding.

College Instructor-Trades

There were five projected vacancies in both 1987 and 1988.

Secretary

There were one to two projected vacancies for 1987 and none for 1988.

2. SCENARIO 2: NEW ECONOMIC GROWTH

The majority of interviewees hesitated to comment on this scenario. Most believed only a major project would impact recruiting policies for either 1987 or 1988. Many see themselves in a retrenchment situation for the next two years as a result of recent government cutbacks. In several isolated instances some expansion is expected, but this was the exception rather than the norm. Most administrators and managers indicated they could meet increases with present staff or with slight staffing increases.

3. *GENERAL BURSARY QUESTIONS*

Each interviewee was asked three general questions on recruitment and the Bursary Program. This allowed comment on the relationship between the Bursary and their own recruiting policies and suggestions on fine tuning the program to increase its effectiveness.

Question : "Have you any suggestions to make about the Bursary Program based on your own experience hiring new graduates?"

Generally, the Bursary Program is regarded as positive for the North. A number of interviewees, while vaguely aware of the Bursary, were unsure of how many, if any, Bursary recipients they had hired. Many school administrators believe Bursary recipients should highlight this fact in their applications. Employers who had hired Bursary recipients gave positive evaluations about the job performance of Bursary holders. Several administrators commented that northern experience is very important. Awarding the Bursary to students who have grown up or spent some time in the North, seems to offer a greater chance of job satisfaction during the work service obligation. This increases the possibility of the employee remaining beyond the two year work service term.

A sampling of the replies follows:

"We've had some people in some specialty areas and we've found it to be very positive and also good for attracting students to or back to the region (both specialists and generalists)."

"It's working. We've hired several teachers from the program. It's been good for us and good for them...many have stayed beyond two years and put down roots in the community."

"It does encourage people to return to an area."

"Recruiting is not difficult at the entry level. It is difficult at the more senior level requiring experience."

"If we had a young Indian student who was interested in cross cultural work in education, that's an area where money could be well spent. Also in Math and Science and anything for "special needs" students."

"Bursary students should be advised to make contact with the jurisdiction with which they are primarily interested so that administrators are aware they are out there; otherwise they have no special status when their applications arrive with a whole bunch of others--especially with reference to graduates of the system since many superintendents are glad to hire system graduates."

"I think its a good program. We've hired a couple of people, one of whom was a godsend."

"If in applications for jobs, they would indicate they have a Bursary obligation to teach in the North, it may have an effect on our hiring. We know they are committed for a two year minimum."

"It would be nice if students would clearly identify that they're on Bursary when applying for jobs. Because, all things being equal, if we knew, we would give preference."

"I can't say I know much about it. We hire students with bursary obligations (I don't know if they are yours or not). That's terrific because we always need staff in the North."

"An excellent idea. We always find it a challenge to get instructors especially for more isolated communities."

"I'm very much in favor of it. We really need it; people have to go so far (for education)."

"It would be useful to know who's out there...it's better to have a good person from the North than someone from the middle of Montreal. By and large, I don't know who these people (Bursary recipients) are...If there's any way of identifying the committed; let me emphasize that,...these people will be the long term leaders in the North. All you need is six a year."

"Return service creates a market for us of people who might not otherwise be available to us. We're happy with a two-year commitment for the North."

The conclusions are that the Bursary is positively regarded and is seen as a viable method of increasing the pool of available employees in the North. In addition, it is perceived as a useful way of encouraging and enabling northern residents to attend schools and return to the North with their newly-acquired skills. The interviewees' major suggestion would appear to be "keep up the good work and to find a way to indicate to would -be employers just who these Bursary recipients are.

Question 2: "Have you any comments about hiring highly qualified personnel?"

Generally, replies indicate that it is not as difficult as it once was to recruit in the North. This is tempered by the provision that the more specialized the position the more difficult it is to recruit. Also, it is still difficult to recruit for those positions which require a combination of education and experience. There is still a dependence upon eastern Canada, particularly for French immersion and French instruction teachers. However, a number of interviewees did experience some difficulty in recruiting although not as much as in the past. Recruitment may become even less difficult as layoffs continue in Edmonton and Calgary. It is still too early to tell whether the cutbacks will decrease the turnover rate.

A sample of the replies includes:

"There is definitely a difficulty with French immersion and some difficulty in some specialist areas, such as computer co-ordination for district."

"Certainly in French immersion area, it's very difficult, the more specialized, the more difficult."

"At the moment, no. It's a buyer's market. The market is flooded with teachers. There are probably 2,000 unemployed teachers out there...The year before last, some specialist positions were hard to fill whereas one year later, it's been easy to fill them with qualified personnel even late in the year."

"It's not at all difficult to get qualified people. It's a very stable situation; we had only one turnover last year and that was a receptionist."

"It's difficult getting more established people (into community). Our toughest area is middle management/administrative positions where 90% require a degree or combined experience plus degree, and I expect that a Bursary for people going back to school would work."

"We have difficulty with specialized positions such as French immersion, library services, business education with strong computer background and senior high math and science. Rural areas have a hard time competing with urban centres."

"When we hire vocational people, it's difficult. But our staff is very stable at present. We haven't hired vocational (excluding industrial arts) for a long time. We hired a person who could teach industrial arts in French one-and-a-half years ago from the East."

"The Bursary is another way to get people in the North when things are rolling. If I had two equivalent candidates, one from north and one from elsewhere, I'd take the northerner, for knowledge of the area and stability of employment."

"We have some difficulty in French and speech therapy. Yes, and some difficulty in attracting good math and science people but it's much better than it was a few years ago."

"You should be ensuring that Northern Alberta Development Council Bursaries go to someone who has shown interest (i.e., courses) in intercultural education. Unless you have taught in a classroom in northern Alberta, you don't understand the chemistry of teaching there."

"Our biggest problems are Francophone teachers. Northern Alberta small towns of 1,200 - 1,800 people are difficult. I do a lot of public relations work showing people the town, and its amenities. Still, isolation and size is a factor."

"One thing...the applications we receive are from recent graduates. We have trouble finding experienced teachers although in the last few years, we have received a lot of applications from new teachers. The average turnover is 40% a year. Without the Bursary, we would probably fill all positions (lots of easterners) but with the Bursary, you get more northern Albertans."

"It's difficult for French, but other than that, no difficulty. French teachers are largely from New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec. I would hire an Albertan if I could."

"We have done a lot of hiring over the years in eastern Canada. Our needs have never been filled by Alberta universities, so a lot of western Canadians are unemployed because of this."

"The Bursary makes it easier. It is difficult to attract specialist teachers in isolated areas. With the teacher surplus, it's easy to get a generalist. They are willing to come out, but do have difficulty adjusting to the isolation."

"It's not difficult in the regular teaching force. There is some difficulty with highly qualified administrative people since experience is required."

"It's not difficult. Perhaps in some areas mentioned, it's difficult. Generally speaking, it's not difficult."

"It's more difficult to recruit staff for the North. Turnover is higher but not impossible."

"It's easy to get them, hard to keep them. In the last six to eight years, there has been an abundance of good applicants."

It should be noted that employers in non-educational fields find recruiting more difficult than educators do. This is especially true for librarians.

As one librarian remarked:

"It's difficult to hire. The cost-of-living is very high. A lot of people can't start at the bottom of grid because of cost and the perception that it (community) is not as desirable to live in."

Other non-education remarks include:

"It's more difficult to recruit staff for the North; turnover is higher but not impossible."

"It is very difficult. I'm usually looking at a choice of one or two candidates when I advertise and then it's a take-it or leave-it situation."

"Yes. Even at the entry level, it's a problem attracting qualified people."

"Traditionally, the North is an area somewhat harder to recruit to. As a rule, we are looking for education and experience. Experience is very important."

Question 3: "Do you think the Bursary Program is an incentive for attracting graduates in your department's/firm's expertise?"

The Bursary is generally regarded in a positive way. Many recruiters see its usefulness as indirectly increasing the pool of available employees as well as educating Northerners to return to the North.

"Anything that's an incentive to attracting graduates to the North is good."

"It helps us all in this northern area."

"I don't know if it's an incentive to attract them to our Board, although it does attract them into the North and since we're near an urban centre, we probably benefit indirectly from this."

"It's a good program to get local people to return to the area and to get stability with staff. Young people just come and go and that's destructive."

"It's definitely something that should continue. We'll be using it once we're over the hump of the next two or three years. This helps us, especially if we can hire northerners with ties to the community, it's an important factor."

"Many times I don't even know which ones have Bursaries."

"Without the Bursary, we would probably fill all positions (lots of easterners) but with the Bursary, you get more northern Albertans."

"Factors such as support letters, having lived in the North, commitment to the North should all be used in making the award, rather than having it go to people who just want free money."

"I guess it would be because kids who get it have to return to northern Alberta but as they are not identified, I wouldn't know. Recipients could answer that better than I can. I could still hire highly qualified people without the Bursary. It helps kids but not me."

"I thought it was a very positive program into the North."

"We haven't really had that many. It's been a big help to those students who went out of the area and came back to teach. It's more a recognition of their loyalty to the system than an incentive."

"I'm supportive of it. I was in the Territories and was able to get my MSW through their bursary."

"If it's targeted and people have a commitment to return to the region."

"I probably would rate it at a low level. We have not received that many applicants who have a Bursary obligation."

"It gives an incentive to consider working in areas where they would generally not work. I have doubts about people who only do it for the money and hope our system would not be saddled with one of those who regard teaching in the North as a penance."

"It could be. I'm not aware of anyone receiving a bursary. It's not always put on the resume."

"No. Because there are so many good teachers. They're better today than they were yesterday, and they'll be better tomorrow than they are today. It does have the effect of making them teach up North for two years. But, the trick is how to keep them."

"If there's any way of identifying the committed, emphasize that; especially if you can make some pre-judgement as to their success. Sponsor them. They will be the long-term leaders of the North and all you need is six a year."

MEDICINE AND HEALTH

This group was composed of hospital, health unit and two dental office administrators. As already discussed, each interviewee was asked to estimate employment openings based on two economic scenarios - the "attrition" scenario and the "new economic growth" scenario. In addition to these specific questions on hiring predictions, they were asked three general questions with reference to recruiting personnel and the Northern Alberta Development Council Bursary Program.

1. SCENARIO 1 "ATTRITION"

In this scenario, respondents were asked how many new graduates they anticipated hiring in 1987 and 1988 based on the assumption that no economic change is anticipated in their region. The occupational predictions were categorized into one of the four basic occupational categories previously discussed.

CATEGORY 1: "VERY DIFFICULT HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

Physio-therapist

There were 16.5 to 18.5 projected vacancies in northern Alberta for physio-therapists for 1987 and 15 more predicted vacancies for 1988. This was the highest number of vacancies for any occupation in the Medicine and Health category. Many positions had been vacant for some time. One administrator who stated that he had been recruiting for a physio-therapist for one year without success, had started to recruit outside the country.

Another administrator mentioned that his hospital preferred to hire people with experience rather than new graduates. He did add that a new graduate with nursing experience prior to entering the physio-therapy program would qualify under this policy. This approach is illustrative of an underlying theme in the interviews. That is, many administrators prefer people with some form of experience in the health field and are particularly interested in encouraging their own staff to upgrade qualifications, especially if they return to their home communities to work.

Occupational Therapist

There were seven openings projected for this occupation in the fall of 1986 and five for the fall of 1988. This was the second largest vacancy rate in the Medicine and Health category. Like physio-therapy, occupational therapists are in great demand across the country. This means that hospitals and health units must engage in heavy recruiting both in Canada and abroad. This shortage can lead to situations like that described by one administrator who looked for an occupational therapist for so long that funding for the position eventually lapsed despite the need.

The administrator of a hospital in a small isolated community with a transient population, noted that his hospital would like to hire either an occupational therapist or a physio-therapist but thus far has been unsuccessful in recruitment efforts.

Dental Hygienist

This occupation had five to six projected vacancies for 1987 and one more for 1988. Like other occupations in the Medicine and Health category, it is marked by lengthy vacancies. In the words of one health unit administrator, "It's a major problem getting dental hygienists." Since dental hygienists fill a critical role in the preventive dentistry field, this scarcity has a significant effect on health care in northern communities.

Speech Therapist/Speech Pathologist/Audiologist

There were four listed vacancies for speech therapists and pathologists for the fall of 1987 and one more for the fall of 1988. There was one listed vacancy for an audiologist for the fall of 1987 and no vacancy for the fall of 1988. It should be noted, however, that the audiologist and speech therapist/pathologist functions are closely related so some employers regard the two occupations as somewhat interchangeable. They are very important in the diagnostic and rehabilitative areas of community health and the lack of these professionals could have a serious negative impact on the speech attainment and quality of youngsters in an area. The relatively low number of vacancies should be regarded skeptically as it is possible that positions have either never been created or have been abolished due to financial constraints and difficulty in recruiting.

Pharmacy

There were three listed vacancies in this occupation for 1987 and two more for 1988. A large number of respondents commented that recruitment of pharmacists for hospitals is extremely difficult. They perceive the problem to be the result of competition from the private sector where pharmacists can earn much more than in a hospital setting.

Baccalaureate Degree and Specialized Skill Nurse

There were five listed vacancies in this occupation for 1987 and five more for 1988. The demand tends to be centred in community health delivery in health units, and specialized hospital functions such as cardiac care or trauma care. One health unit administrator commented that for BSc nurses, "Recruitment in the north is on-going." Another administrator said "There is no shortage of fresh (non-baccalaureate) RNs but recruitment of experienced nurses with special skills is more difficult."

CATEGORY 2: "DIFFICULT TO HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

There were no medicine and health occupations in this category.

CATEGORY 3: "MODERATELY DIFFICULT TO HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

Non-Baccalaureate Registered Nurses

There were 96 to 101 projected vacancies for registered nurses in 1987 and 58-74 projected vacancies in 1988.

Most administrators indicated that recruitment is not difficult at this level since there are a large number of graduates, many from northern colleges. They did point out, however, that turnover is high and that new graduates from the cities often work in the North for experience and then return to the urban environments from which they came. Administrators

praised nursing programs in the North (Keyano and Grande Prairie) and bursary programs as ways of educating northern residents for northern nursing careers.

CATEGORY 4: "RELATIVELY EASY TO HIRE FOR" OCCUPATIONS

Registered Nursing Assistant

There were 40 to 50 projected positions for this occupation in the fall of 1987 and 30-39 positions for the fall of 1988. While it appears to be a high-in-demand occupation, most employers indicated they could easily fill these positions from their local communities. No employers foresee any problem with recruitment.

Laboratory Technician

Employers estimated six to seven openings for 1987 and two to three openings for 1988. Again, most employers indicated that recruitment is not a problem.

X-ray Technician

Employers predicted six to seven openings in 1987 and two to three openings in 1988. Again, no problems with recruitment are expected.

Other Technologies

One employer predicted two openings in 1987 and two in 1988 for radiology technicians. Another employer predicted one opening for a respiratory technologist in 1987 and one in 1988. These technologies are more specialized than laboratory and X-ray technologies and recruitment is somewhat more difficult. Employers noted that frequently technicians

return to school for upgrading and then return to their former employers. This was cited as an important part of manpower planning since many employers prefer to re-hire staff they are already familiar with rather than start fresh with an unknown quantity. This was mentioned with respect to RNAs upgrading to RNs, for RNs upgrading to Baccalaureate RNs as well as for technicians upgrading to more sophisticated skill levels such as radiology technologist, respiratory technologist and ultra-sonnagrapher.

Ultrasonnagrapher

Although there were only one vacancy for 1987 and two for 1988 projected, these are difficult-to-fill positions. One administrator advised that he had an X-ray technologist on leave for training in this area and, hence, technically did not have a vacancy. He was uncertain whether this employee would in fact return to work or take employment elsewhere on completion of her coursework. Another administrator advised that her hospital conducts its own in-house training for this position and also sends technicians to Winnipeg and the United States for up to one year of training.

2. SCENARIO 2

Most administrators were unable to predict any major project in the surrounding communities. A number did mention expansion projects in their hospitals as affecting employment. Beyond this, they were quite conservative in predicting economic activity. The pattern of prediction is considerably smaller in 1988 than in 1987. In addition to problems with the economy, employers based predictions on the belief that the 1987 positions would be filled. If in fact positions in the difficult to fill categories are not filled in 1987, they could remain vacant in 1988 and thus increase the 1988 figures accordingly. This increase is subject to the provision that the positions are not abolished as a result of government cutbacks and freezes.

3. GENERAL QUESTIONS

Each interviewee was asked three general questions relating to experiences in recruiting new staff and to the perception of the Northern Alberta Development Council Bursary's role in recruitment.

Question 1: Have you any suggestions to make about the Bursary Program based on your own experience in hiring new graduates?

Most interviewees had positive and interesting comments.

A number of themes recurred. These included:

- Publicize the program more.
- Concentrate on making the Bursary available to students studying for "difficult to recruit for" occupations.
- Assist already employed people who want to upgrade their qualifications.

A short summary of comments follows:

- "Focus on speech and dental."
- "Make the Bursary Program available to RNAs who want to upgrade to RNs."
- "Don't worry about nursing; concentrate on physios, OTs, lab and X-ray technicians."
- "There is not enough advertising about what is available."

"It would be good to upgrade, i.e., RNs to baccalaureate RNs and RNAs to RNs, looking more at 'career laddering'. There should be some relief for part-time study."

"The program, if better known, would probably generate more applicants. It helps to get a commitment. People have a tendency to get an attachment to your hospital if they come out of your (Bursary) program."

" At the time people are applying (for Bursary):

1. They should make tentative inquiries about employment possibilities; it helps if they go to a hospital since it helps the hospital with manpower planning as the lead time for program development is approximately two years.

2. It would help if employers could be advised of those people going through on the Bursary, especially MDs, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and dieticians."

"A good program. We find that nurses who are trained up here (Grande Prairie) tend to stay here, whereas, if they go away to university they tend to stay away unless there is an incentive to return, i.e., the Bursary obligation."

"I'm supportive of the program as I'm aware of it. A lot of graduates, several of whom might not have come North, came North."

Question 2: Have you any comments about hiring highly qualified personnel?

Most interviewees commented that they do not have difficulty in recruiting for generalist positions such as nurse and laboratory technician. Recruitment for more specialized positions is another matter. Also, recruitment for any type of job in an isolated community is difficult for all occupations.

A sample of comments follows:

"Sometimes we do (have difficulty). Most of the time you can't find help although sometimes there are too many skilled people around."

"Physios, OTs, pharmacists are the most difficult."

"It is difficult, even though we are in a nice area. As in other rural areas there is a reluctance to relocate to small areas."

"We've been fairly fortunate. We did have some problems with lab and X-ray but not any more. We don't have a physio (position) so we have no problem there although they are hard to get."

"In some areas - physios, OTs - it has certainly been particularly difficult."

"It's really difficult...Where we have vacancies, we find some really qualified people who relocate."

"Certainly it is difficult to attract qualified personnel, i.e., physios. I spent a whole week going through phone books phoning every single physio school and association, and I advertised across the country. We got three responses and by the time we got back to them, they had other jobs."

"In many cases you need people with a very sound background of northern working conditions. In the North, you're competing with the city for the small (10%) minority who might be interested in the non-urban environment."

"So far, the only Bursary graduates coming our way are nurses. We've received the list and contacted students to let them know they could work at our hospital. Safeway, IGA and Shopper's Drug Mart can offer a far more lucrative package to pharmacists than we can."

"It's not really difficult. We're big enough that it's not really difficult. We've had some really qualified people come from the city to our community for administrative nursing jobs and stay two to three years."

"We have great difficulty with physios. Foreign applicants can't be licensed until completion of a six-month course at a teaching hospital. But as soon as the course is completed, they take a job there."

"Dental hygiene is the most difficult area. We haven't had much of a problem with speech as we have a stable work force. It's not a problem with nursing. But we also have a problem getting physios".

"Yes. We have people who are married so that their spouses work in the area. But we've had no luck with advertising, i.e., we have a physio because her husband lives here. The same applies to our lab staff. We have people, but its more by luck than by design."

"In some areas, like speech and dental, it's difficult; there is not so much difficulty with nursing generally, although it's difficult to get BSc nurses."

Question 3: Do you think the Bursary Program is an incentive for attracting graduates in your department's/firm's expertise?

The majority of interviewees made positive comments. They tend to see an indirect connection between the Bursary and their own recruitment. Many hospitals have their own bursary programs and this is a factor in recruitment. The overall perception seems to be that the Bursary increases the northern job pool so that even employers who do not hire a Bursary recipient benefit.

Comments included:

"I think it's a very good idea. There are lots of girls who would go to the city for diploma type training (dental hygienist, dental assistant, dental lab tech) but can't afford to go - too many costs."

"Yes, they tend to get an attachment to your hospital if they come out of your program...all have stayed over the two year commitment for more than a year."

"Yes, but with the economy the way it is right now, it's about to become more of an incentive. If you can get them here and get them settled, it usually works."

"Yes - indirectly. Those students who needed help then have an obligation to the North. So, even though we may not have hired him/her, presumably his/her presence has increased the pool of available manpower."

"It's very good for the North since fresh graduates tend to go North over the city which prefers experience. It's also good for upgrading."

"Yes, I think a bursary program of any kind is good. However, our board has its own bursary program: we don't get that many applicants."

"If there wasn't a program there would be a lot of people who just wouldn't get the education."

"It has been definitely beneficial for the nurses and since receiving the list from NADC, we've found it gives us a good starting point and people we can contact especially beyond nursing for physios, OTs and pharmacists."

"Yes, I'm keen on it. It brings university-educated kids out of Edmonton and back into the community. After six months they don't want to leave again."

"It's got to help. Particularly taking people who have already lived in the North. It's easier then to recruit them than people from downtown Edmonton or Toronto."

"Certainly, if it's for young people that are from here. It should attract them to return to the area."

CONCLUSION

Certain common threads emerged from the study:

a) Employers are conservative in estimating manpower needs. This is particularly evident in the Science and Engineering category.

b) Employers generally indicated that it is less difficult to attract graduates into the North. However, those that are attracted, particularly for difficult to fill positions, tend to be from Southern Alberta.

c) Employers stressed the importance of hiring people familiar with the North. Respondents in the Medicine and Health category were particularly emphatic about this.

d) The closer the contact between the prospective employee and the isolated conditions and problems that go with isolation the more important the need for employees with northern exposure.

e) The farther a community is away from Edmonton, the more difficult it is to fill positions, especially in more isolated communities and especially for hard-to-fill positions in medicine, health and specialized education.

f) A positive attitude toward the Bursary Program exists in theory. But many people admitted they had limited experience with the program, and scant information about it.

g) Medicine and health respondents indicated that upgrading is an important aspect of staff development and retention. This goes hand-in-hand with the importance of northern experience since it enables northerners to upgrade and apply their new skills to the North. Examples frequently given were RNs studying for their BSc in nursing, and technicians studying for more advanced technical training.

h) The more skilled and more in demand the position, the more difficult it is to fill. Hence, X-ray technicians with a general one-year X-ray technical program are quite common but technicians with expertise in ultrasound are quite rare and are in high demand.

i) There is competition between the private and public sectors for a number of high-in-demand jobs. These include: dental hygienist, dental assistant, physiotherapist and pharmacist. The private sector has driven the remuneration for these positions above what is provided for in the existing collective agreements with the result that northern hospitals and health care units must compete with urban hospitals and health care units as well as with the private sector.

j) In education, French instruction and French immersion teachers are the positions which are most-in-demand and require out-of-province recruitment. The number of Alberta-educated French specialists is fewer than the demand. They tend to be grabbed by urban, southern schools.

k) For most educators, recruitment is not a problem at the generalist level. The more specialized the training, the more difficult recruitment. The only exception is recruitment for small isolated schools. Turnover tends to be very high in these schools with few new teachers remaining beyond the two years required for certification.

l) In the words of one health unit administrator, "There is no downside to health care delivery." This means that health care requirements will always be with us, particularly in areas in the North experiencing population growth.

m) Employers can now adapt to changing economic markets much more quickly. Unlike the late 70s, employers have the infrastructure and personnel in place to meet increases in demand when they occur. As well, they have a battery of qualified people to tap quickly when required.